



The Human Services Workforce Initiative

JUVENILE JUSTICE

Exploring the Effect of Juvenile Justice System Functioning and Employee Turnover on Recidivism Rates



Prepared by
National Council on Crime and Delinquency

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Exploring the Effect of Juvenile Justice System Functioning and Employee Turnover on Recidivism Rates

Introduction

The Human Services Workforce Initiative (HSWI) is focused on the frontline workers serving vulnerable children and families. HSWI's premise is that human services matter. Delivered well, they can, and do, positively impact the lives of vulnerable children and families, often at critical points in their lives.

We believe that the quality of the frontline worker influences the effectiveness of services they deliver to children and families. If workers are well-trained and supported, have access to the resources that they need, possess a reasonable workload and are valued by their employers, it follows that they will be able to effectively perform their jobs. If, however, they are as vulnerable as the children and families that they serve, they will be ineffective in improving outcomes for children and families.

Unfortunately, all indications today are that our frontline human services workforce is struggling. In some instances poor compensation contributes to excessive turnover; in others an unreasonable workload and endless paperwork renders otherwise capable staff ineffective; and keeping morale up is difficult in the human services fields and it is remarkable that so many human services professionals stick to it, year after year.

HSWI's mission is to work with others to raise the visibility of, and sense of urgency about, workforce issues. Through a series of publications and other communications efforts we hope to:

- β Call greater attention to workforce issues.
- β Help to describe and define the status of the human services workforce.
- β Disseminate data on current conditions.
- β Highlight best and promising practices.
- β Suggest systemic and policy actions which can make a deep, long term difference.

In this paper by the National Council on Crime and Delinquency (NCCD) explores difficult and critical questions about the relationship between staff turnover in the juvenile justice system and recidivism.

Additional information on the human services workforce, and on HSWI, is available at www.cornerstones4kids.org.

Cornerstones For Kids
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Exploring the Effect of Juvenile Justice System Functioning and Employee Turnover on Recidivism Rates

Executive Summary

Introduction

Juvenile justice agencies across the country are grappling with the problems associated with high employee turnover rates. Excessive employee turnover is troubling for many reasons. Critical decisions that may impact the safety of youth, staff, and the general public are made by a high number of new and inexperienced probation intake officers. The efficiency of juvenile justice processing is diminished by a continuing stream of new employees. Rehabilitation activities and services provided to youths suffer because stability is a critical factor in an intervention's success. Further, the costs for providing juvenile justice services are skyrocketing, and some of the causes are high staff turnover, high detention rates, and a large percentage of youth cycling back through the system.

Study Description

This report is an important first step in examining the critical agency-level factors that affect youth outcomes. The focus of the analysis was how workplace variables impact both the efficiency and the effectiveness of juvenile justice agencies. Specifically targeted were workplace variables that can be manipulated by agency and government policies and practices, including staffing ratios, caseloads, and salaries of employees. "Efficiency" is a construct that contained variables such as case processing time, programmatic success for the juveniles, and employee turnover rates. "Effectiveness" was simply measured as the rate of recidivism. For quantitative analysis, NCCD used data collected by the Texas Juvenile Probation Commission from nearly all Texas juvenile justice jurisdictions in 2002. For additional qualitative data, NCCD performed semi-structured interviews between March and August 2004 with key personnel from 20 Texas counties representing the demographic and geographic diversity of the state.

Affectable Factors

A multivariate regression analysis with all the aforementioned workplace characteristics and efficiency characteristics found that three factors were significantly related to reduced recidivism: lower caseload size, higher number of intake officers per referral, and higher salaries of line officers. This analysis suggests that if agencies can lower their average daily caseload, hire more intake officers per referral, and pay higher salaries, they will improve their client outcomes by reducing recidivism.

There are many potential reasons why youths in one jurisdiction may be less likely to return to the system than in another jurisdiction. Among others, these could include: crime rate, treatment program quality and availability, school district policies of referral, and community resources. However, there are only some factors under the control of the juvenile justice agency. This study found three factors that *are* under the control of the jurisdiction can reduce recidivism. If recidivism is reduced by channeling resources into these areas, it is likely that costs associated with the reforms will be recaptured with lower numbers of youths coming back into the system. Further research and cost analyses must be done to quantify these potential effects. Replicating these findings across other states and jurisdictions will require careful consideration of the wide variation across states and agencies in workplace characteristics, juvenile populations, and community factors often not under the control of the juvenile justice system.

Interviews Round Out the Data

Together the qualitative and quantitative findings suggest four different areas where change is necessary to improve staff retention and client outcomes: a) probation officer work environment, b) salary and salary supplements, c) caseload and workload reduction, and d) greater emphasis on community-based resources for youths and their families, especially regarding mental health services and aftercare.

Exploring the Effect of Juvenile Justice System Functioning and Employee Turnover on Recidivism Rates

Introduction

Juvenile probation officers, corrections officers, and other juvenile justice workers typically change jobs frequently, and agencies tend to experience high rates of job turnover. Staff turnover rates have been estimated to be as high as 80 percent (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2003).¹ The administrators of juvenile justice agencies across the country are grappling with the problems associated with these high employee turnover rates. Excessive employee turnover is troubling for many reasons:

- Critical decisions that may impact public safety are made by a high number of new and inexperienced probation intake officers.
- The safety of youths and staff are at risk when high turnover results in inexperienced detention and corrections officers supervising detained or incarcerated youth.
- The efficiency of juvenile justice processing is diminished by a continuing stream of new employees.
- Rehabilitation activities and services provided to youths suffer because stability is a critical factor in an intervention's success.

The Texas juvenile justice system is not exempt from the problems faced throughout juvenile justice agencies across the country. The Texas Juvenile Probation Commission (TJPC) estimated the total cost of turnover for juvenile probation, detention, and corrections officers in fiscal year 1999 was between \$5.1 and \$7.7 million. In 1999, the Commission interviewed a large sample of certified juvenile probation officers in Texas to identify the reasons for job turnover.² Their main findings were:

- The majority of responding officers indicated that their job as a juvenile probation officer was worthwhile.
- Probation officers are committed to reforming young offenders.

¹ Annie E. Casey Foundation, *The Unsolved Challenge of System Reform: The condition of the Frontline Human Services Workforce* (Baltimore, MD: AECF, 2003).

² Texas Juvenile Probation Commission, *A study of salaries and turnover rates of juvenile probation department personnel in Texas* (Austin, TX: Texas Juvenile Probation Commission, 2000).

- Over 91% of the participating juvenile probation officers mentioned that their job as a juvenile probation officer was interesting to them.
- Salary levels and the lack of a career ladder were the top two sources of job dissatisfaction cited by juvenile probation officers.
- Of the recommendations cited by officers for retaining current employees, an increase in pay and establishment of a system of promotion for employees were ranked highest.

In response, the Texas legislature approved funds (approximately \$10 million per year) to provide salary supplements to all certified juvenile probation, detention, and corrections officers under the auspices of the Texas Juvenile Probation Commission. An internal research report evaluating the impact of the salary supplements showed a one-third decrease in turnover after implementing this new financial incentive. The average turnover rates of juvenile probation officers and detention workers decreased from 15 percent and 31 percent in 1999 to 10 and 20 percent, respectively, in 2002. While for many these rates are still too high, they are lower than those of other juvenile justice agencies. Texas has shown that an agency can reduce employee turnover.

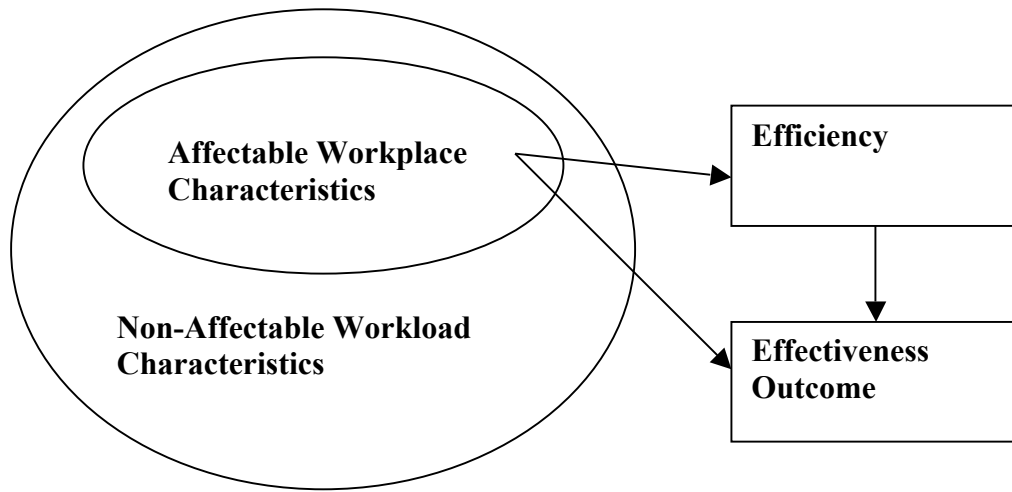
Goal of the Current Study

The state of Texas, then, is a good starting point to explore the effect of workplace issues on client outcomes. The goal of this study was to learn more about the effect of workplace characteristics on the efficiency and effectiveness of the juvenile justice system. This report is an important first step in examining the critical agency-level factors that affect youth outcomes.

In order to best describe the relationships among the different system characteristics, we created the simple heuristic below. The model shows that there are characteristics of the agency workload that the agency is not able to change and characteristics of the workplace that can be manipulated. We are calling these variables “non-affectable” and “affectable.” The model shows that although the non-affectable characteristics are underlying the functioning of the system, they do not directly impact the efficiency and effectiveness of the juvenile justice system. Furthermore, because certain workload characteristics are not under the control of the agency, they are only

important to take into account because they are the sea in which the agency must swim. Thus, the model shows that the focus of the analysis will be on the affectable workplace variables and how they impact both the efficiency and the effectiveness of the juvenile justice agencies.

Figure 1: Heuristic Describing Relationship of Workplace Characteristics to Efficiency and Effectiveness



Affectable characteristics include staffing ratios, caseloads, and salaries of employees. The model indicates that these workplace characteristics affect the efficiency of the organization. Efficiency is a construct that contains variables such as case processing time, programmatic success for the juveniles, and employee turnover rates. Finally, the model shows that the effectiveness of the juvenile justice system is influenced by the both the characteristics of the workplace and the system's efficiency in handling cases. Effectiveness is simply measured as the rate of recidivism.

Research Methods and Data Collection

The data used to address the goals of this study are multifaceted and include quantitative and qualitative data as well as both primary and secondary types of data

collection. NCCD used pre-collected databases and semi-structured interviews as sources of data.

Quantitative Data

Secondary data was provided by the Texas Juvenile Probation Commission. The TJPC uses these data for case management purposes as well as conducting its own monitoring, research, and evaluation projects. Most of the data used for the current study were collected at the individual level in each jurisdiction. NCCD aggregated these individual-level data for the year 2002 to create agency-level scores for each jurisdiction.

Secondary Data Sample

In the period under study, Texas had 254 counties served by 164 juvenile probation departments. Several departments served multi-county jurisdictions. Our final sample consisted of 148 jurisdictions out of the 163 jurisdictions that supplied complete data to TJCP. Fifteen counties were removed from the final analysis because their limited number of total referrals and limited number of staff did not allow for meaningful comparison to the other counties on most of the key variables. Specifically, five of the removed counties had ten or less total referrals in the study period and fourteen counties had a probation department consisting of only one qualifying officer (that is, one person served as Chief and the sole probation officer.) None of the removed counties had correction or detention officers on staff. T-tests showed the excluded counties differed from the final sample only in the total number of referrals, as expected ($p < .05$).

Non-Affectable Workload Characteristics

Three variables were used to describe the underlying workload of each of the agencies. The non-affectable workload characteristics include the incoming number and need level of juveniles from each of the jurisdictions. Specifically, the agency-level variables that represent non-affectable workload are:

1. Population size of juveniles (ages 10-17) in the jurisdiction
2. Severity of offenders – percent of offenders charged with violent felonies
3. Estimate of youths needs – percent of youths who needed further evaluation based on a standardized juvenile justice assessment tool

Affectable Workplace Characteristics

Agencies have control over many aspects of the workload and workplace environment. For the purposes of this study, agency-level variables were constructed that measure the workload at intake, caseload for probation officers, supervisory ratio, and the average salaries of the officers. These variables were operationalized as follows:

1. Intake workload – number of referrals divided by number of intake staff
2. Average daily caseload – number of cases per probation officer on an average daily basis
3. Supervisor ratio – number of line officers divided by the number of supervisors
4. Average salary – for line officers.

Efficiency Outcomes

There are many ways to quantify the efficiency levels of an organization. We chose four different indicators of efficiency that would be most likely to influence the effectiveness of the agency. These variables include employee turnover rates, case processing time, successful program completion, and the number of placement changes. We would expect that these indicators are related; one type of inefficiency in the system is likely to influence another. For instance, one would expect that higher staff turnover would increase the case processing time or the success of the probation supervision experience. These relationships will be tested empirically in the findings section.

The following variables were aggregated to the jurisdiction level prior to analysis:

1. Staff turnover
 - a. probation only
 - b. probation combined with detention and corrections officers
2. Case processing time
 - a. mean number of days between intake and first supervision
 - b. mean number of days between intake and first placement
3. Probation supervision success – percent of youth successfully completing probation supervision
4. Placement changes – mean number of placements per youth

Effectiveness Outcome

The best way to judge the effectiveness of a probation or corrections system is to assess how many youths return. Thus, recidivism was the only effectiveness outcome

measured in this study. This main client outcome variable was operationalized as follows:

Recidivism – re-referral to the jurisdiction for a new offense (not including technical violations) within 6 months of the initial referral during the study period

Qualitative Data

To provide depth and breadth to the quantitative data analysis, NCCD researchers conducted interviews with key personnel from 20 counties representing the demographic and geographic diversity of the state. Between March and August 2004, NCCD research staff conducted 52 interviews with probation and detention staff including some chiefs and deputy chiefs.

The semi-structured interview contained 20 open-ended questions. The interviewers asked participants to describe their perceptions of the effects of salary supplements on their own sense of job satisfaction, on that of their colleagues, and on the outcomes for the youth they served. The instrument also included basic demographic questions about participants' job titles, education levels, licenses, and current salaries. The survey concluded with general questions about the factors that influence the trajectories of their career paths.

Findings

The findings have been organized according to the heuristic presented earlier. We first give basic descriptions of each variable, then describe the analysis, which consisted of basic correlations followed by multivariate modeling. The underlying non-affectable workload characteristics will be described first, followed by affectable workplace characteristics, efficiency outcomes, and the effectiveness outcome. In describing these variables, we have used the mean statistic and discuss the median only if it is substantially different. Next, the simple bivariate correlations will be examined to show the interrelationships. Finally, a multivariate model was constructed that will allow us to see the best jurisdictional-level predictors of recidivism. The interview data will be used to provide clarification on important points or gaps in the quantitative data.

Description of Juvenile Justice System Functioning and Outcomes

Non-Affectable Workload Characteristics

Even though agencies cannot control most aspects of workload, it is important to take them into account when analyzing factors that can be manipulated. Incoming workload includes the severity of offenses in the jurisdiction as well as the need level of the incoming young people. Two proxy measures were created to represent the incoming workload. First, severity of offenders was operationalized as the percent of offenders charged with violent felonies. Second, need level was estimated as the percent of youths who needed further evaluation based on MAYSI cutoff scores used at intake. The MAYSI is a standardized screening tool that identifies signs of emotional and mental distress in juvenile justice youths. TJCP uses the MAYSI to identify youths who need further assessment. Also measured was the number of juveniles, ages 10 to 17, within the jurisdictional boundaries (this is akin to measuring county size).

Table 1 shows that across jurisdictions the average percentage of referrals for violent offenses was 6 percent. A small number of jurisdictions had no referrals for violent offenses in 2002, while others had rates as high as 17percent. In some counties, close to one-half of all youths given the MAYSI were identified as needing further assessment. In some counties, no youth met the cutoff criteria. The average percentage of screened youths needing further assessment was 17percent.

Table 1. “Non-Affectable” Incoming Workload Across Jurisdictions (n=148)

	Minimum	Maximum	Average (Mean)	Standard Deviation
Percent of Referrals for Violent Offenses	0%	17%	6%	4%
Identified as Suicidal or High Needs on MAYSI	0%	45%	17%	8%
Juvenile Population Size	801	521,002	21,928	57,395

Counties in Texas vary widely in terms of the size of the juvenile population. However, the majority fall into the small end, as the median is much smaller than the mean (6,900 compared to almost 22,000). Thus, half of the jurisdictions have a juvenile population of less than 7,000.

Affectable Workplace Characteristics

Intake Workload and Caseload

Table 2 shows the range across jurisdictions on the affectable workplace characteristics. The variable representing the incoming workload for intake officers shows a range from 3 to 82 youth per intake officer. The average is 26 referrals per intake officer.

Table 2. “Affectable” Workplace Characteristics (n=148)

	Minimum	Maximum	Average (Mean)	Standard Deviation
Intake Workload (# of referrals/ # of intake officers)	3:1	82:1	26:1	15
Average Daily Caseload	5	73	29	12
Supervisory Ratio (# of workers/ # of supervisors)	1:1	24:1	4:1	4
Average Officer Salary	\$18,040	\$40,000	\$29,126	\$4,190

The average daily caseload varies considerably around an average of 29. Some counties averaged only 5 youths on their caseloads, while others averaged 73 youths. In the interviews with the officers, over 80 percent of caseload-carrying employees expressed dissatisfaction with their workload. About one-half of the officers indicated that their caseloads had become heavier or stayed the same within the past five years. They said that large caseloads were especially problematic with the more recent types of offenders (e.g., younger and more violent than they were in the past). They believed that these clients required more intensive supervision than they were able to provide with a large caseload.

Furthermore, over one-half of the participants mentioned that they were overwhelmed with the amount of paperwork and administrative tasks that they were required to complete for each client. Line officers felt that the state was constantly imposing new mandates and introducing new forms. They expressed a need for hiring staff who are solely responsible for filling out the long list of forms, freeing line officers

to have more direct contact with clients. Importantly, most line officers did not directly see the relevance of the paperwork they were asked to complete and did not see the results of any evaluations conducted using their data.

Staff Supervision and Training

The number of workers per supervisor was quite low on average (only four workers per supervisor). However, there were some counties with large supervision ratios (up to 24 to 1). During the interviews, some officers commented that they felt their supervision and training procedures were inadequate. They said this was especially true for officers who were hired quickly to fill desperately needed positions. They felt this lack of training created a burden for existing staff, as they had to take on heavier caseloads while new employees were trained and certified. Also, line officers indicated that ongoing training should be provided, especially in the form of consistent and adequate evaluation from their supervisors. This type of feedback would encourage line staff to hone their skills, communicate their concerns, and become familiar with best practices.

Salary and Salary Supplements

The average salary for officers per jurisdiction ranged from \$18,000 to \$40,000 with an average of \$29,000. The salary supplement amount that each department received was \$2,850 for each full-time certified probation officer and \$1,425 for each full-time certified detention or corrections officer. Salary supplements are taxed and allocated with each paycheck and appear on check receipts on a separate line from the base salary.

Most officers indicated that the salary supplement had made a difference in their personal finances. In addition, they saw the supplement as an appreciative gesture from the state. Specifically, two-thirds of the line officers asserted that the supplement had a direct impact on their personal finances by providing added financial stability. They said this increase to their paychecks represents half of a car payment, a contribution to their children's college fund, or money toward their own educational advancement.

In large counties, where there were high numbers of detention staff, the supplement was even more important to these employees than it was to probation officers. One detention employee mentioned that there were fewer opportunities for

advancement in her department, so the monthly incentive impacted her finances and those of her coworkers in very tangible ways and was very important to them.

Furthermore, respondents were asked to rate the importance of salary in terms of job satisfaction on a scale of one to five, with one being “not at all important” and five being “essential.” The average response was very important to essential; thus, salary was critical to job satisfaction for most line officers and supervisors who were interviewed. Although salary was important, several line staff reported that their internal motivation was the main source of job satisfaction and that they were not “in it for the money.”

System Efficiency Characteristics

There are also several efficiency characteristics or outcomes of the jurisdictions that can be affected by agency policy. Analyses show considerable variation across jurisdictions in efficiency characteristics as presented in Table 3.

Table 3. System Efficiency Characteristics or Outcomes

	Minimum	Maximum	Average (Mean)	Standard Deviation
Average Number of Placements per Youth	0	2.5	1	.5
Average Length of Time in Detention (in days)	2	41	9	6
Time between referral and first supervision/probation (in days)	.13	117	38	27
Time between referral and first placement (in days)	5	455	136	87
Percent Successful Supervision	26%	100%	85%	11%
Job Turnover (all types of officers)	0%	100%	14%	19%
Job Turnover (Probation only)	0%	100%	12%	18%

Number of Placements

One problem in poorly functioning systems may be that youths may be shuttled around from placement to placement rather than properly placed the first time. In the counties studied, the average number of placements was 1, with a range of 0 to 2.5.

Case Processing Times and Length of Stay in Detention

There was a very large range in the case processing times across jurisdictions. The time between referral and beginning probation ranged from the same day to about 4 months later. The range in the number of days between referral and first placement was even larger, however, and the average time until placement was about 4.5 months. The average length of time in detention was 9 days, although there was a range from less than 2 days to 41 days. A cross-jurisdictional average of almost a month and a half is quite high.

Successful Completion of Probation

In the majority of jurisdictions, most youth successfully completed their probation. However in some jurisdictions, just one quarter of the juveniles completed their probation successfully.

Employee Turnover Rates

The average (mean) turnover rate for probation officers was 12 percent compared to a 21 percent turnover rate for detention and corrections officers. Their combined turnover rate was 14 percent, because detention and corrections officers had higher turnover rates but made up a small portion of the total number of employees³. It is important to note that the median turnover rate was much lower (3 percent for probation officers and 7 percent for all officers combined). The median is the point at which half of the sample falls above and half falls below this number. This discrepancy in different statistics measuring the average is due to the high number of jurisdictions with absolutely no turnover in probation officers. Almost one-half (49 percent) of jurisdictions had no probation officer turnover in the year 2002.

Effectiveness Outcome - Recidivism

Recidivism was the only client outcome variable measured because it is the best indicator of juvenile justice system success that is available. Within six months approximately one-quarter of the juveniles were back in the system (see Table 4). In some jurisdictions this number was as low as 6 percent and others as high as 43 percent.

³ Please note that these numbers are slightly different than in the TJCP report because the number presented here gives equal weight to every jurisdiction regardless of size.

Table 4. Recidivism Outcomes Across Jurisdictions (n=148)

	Minimum	Maximum	Average (Mean)	Standard Deviation
Recidivism Rate (re-offense within 6 months, not including probation violations)	6%	43%	23%	8%

Interview results show that many juvenile justice staff believe that client outcomes were impacted by salary supplements. For large and mid-sized counties, Chief Probation Officers generally observed that the supplement positively impacted morale and decreased turnover among officers. They said this resulted in line officers with a higher sense of job satisfaction, more investment in their jobs, and a greater likelihood of retaining their positions for longer periods of time. Consequently, they believed that line officers were able to be increasingly familiar with the duties of their positions and the youth in their caseloads and were, therefore, better able to make positive impacts in clients' lives.

In addition, they said that more seasoned line officers have a better grasp of available community resources and programs and have established stronger connections with outside agencies. Also, juveniles with more complicated problems who were likely to remain in caseloads for many months were able to retain the same probation officer, who was more familiar with that client's particular needs and circumstances.

Chief Probation Officers also agreed that the reduced turnover rates saved their departments valuable funds; the hiring process is time consuming, and training is expensive. Furthermore, it takes an average of three months for some counties to replace a line officer. In the interim, the caseload of that officer remains in the department and must be split among remaining officers. This increased workload not only serves to increase the stress level, but results in lower quality services delivered to clients.

Several Chief Probation Officers indicated that excessive turnover is a problem, but some degree of turnover is healthy. Younger officers can better relate to younger aged children and perhaps are able to establish a stronger rapport with them. All agreed that turnover rates that are too high translate into low quality services for the youths and may contribute to higher rates of recidivism, longer lengths of detention, and less effective placement.

The line officers themselves, however, had a slightly different point of view: they contend that it is their internal motivation and passion for the job that contributes to their willingness and ability to make positive impacts on clients' lives. Only a few stated that the salary supplement is a factor in determining outcomes for clients, even though over 80 percent of these line officers acknowledged the supplement's impact on morale and turnover.

Simple Bivariate Relationships: Workload, Workplace, and Efficiency

Although simple correlations do not imply causality, it is important to identify significant relationships among all the variables thought to influence outcomes: workload, workplace characteristics, and system efficiency measures. In some cases, data from the interviews can inform the direction and meaning of these relationships.

Simple Correlations with “Non-Affectable” Workload Characteristics

The first group of variables to examine is the non-affectable workplace characteristics. Except for juvenile population size, these variables show little relationship to any other measured variables. For example, the average needs score of the juveniles in the counties (MAYSI cutoff) was not related to any other jurisdiction-level variable. The percentage of violent offenders in a jurisdiction showed only one statistical relationship to all the other variables that were measured—the greater the percent of violent offenders, the longer average detention time. This makes sense as violent offenders are usually held in detention for longer periods of time than youths charged with non-violent crimes.

The number of juveniles within the jurisdiction is related to several other variables. Population size is important to measure because it can be thought of as both the size of the potential pool of clients and a way of measuring the size of the probation department. In the jurisdictions with larger juvenile populations, officer salaries were higher, there were more supervisors per worker, caseloads were higher, and youths were moved from placement to placement more often. In other words, in the larger counties, the officers are paid better and have bigger caseloads, there are more supervisors, and youths are more likely to be shuffled between available placements.

Simple Correlations with Affectable Workplace Characteristics

The affectable variables show many significant relationships. The first affectable variables to discuss are the workplace characteristics. The incoming workload variable (ratio of referrals to intake staff) shows a significant correlation with recidivism. The higher the workload, the higher the recidivism rate and vice versa. At first the next finding might seem strange, but a higher incoming workload is negatively correlated with the time a youth spends in detention on average. It may be that the jurisdictions with heavier intake workloads are processing youth out of detention more quickly because their facilities are generally overcrowded.

Simple Correlations with System Efficiency Characteristics

The number of placements a youth entered was related to several variables. A higher number of placements per youth was related to higher caseloads, lower supervision ratio (more workers per supervisor), longer case processing times, and more unsuccessful supervision/probation outcomes. These findings lead to speculation that an overworked probation department can lead to more movement through placements for clients.

Unexpectedly, job turnover rates were not significantly related to any of the other jurisdictional variables. Also, average salary did not significantly correlate with any of the variables measured except for the size of the juvenile population in the jurisdiction (although it is important in the multivariate analysis discussed in the next section). The reason that salary level is only related to population size is that the state agency (TJCP) sets the salary standards, but also allows for a cost of living variance. Cost of living is usually greater in larger counties. Thus, the variance in salary is mostly related to experience levels of staff rather than fundamentally different rates of pay.

Also, it is likely that salary supplements had an initial effect on turnover rates and that turnover was reduced to such low levels that we see little variation in later years. With almost one-half of the jurisdictions having zero staff turnover, it seems that the salary supplements have already had their effect and that other jurisdictional differences are less important.

Hopefully, the content of the interviews sheds some light on this complicated subject. Responses to the interviews indicated that views concerning the impact of salary supplements on turnover varied among small, medium, and large counties. In large

counties, 79 percent of the 29 participants reported that their county's ability to retain employees had increased since the salary supplements were issued.

Chief Probation Officers in large counties emphasized that the supplement had an especially significant impact on retention rates for detention employees. Since these workers were paid less on average, the supplement had a significant effect on their finances and was seen as recognition for their difficult jobs.

The salary incentive was also very important for retention of probation officers in large counties. Participants were generally aware that adult or federal probation positions are higher paying or that they offer better opportunities for advancement. Accordingly, a salary supplement encouraged these experienced probation officers to retain their positions in juvenile probation. Furthermore, the supplement made their salaries competitive with teachers' salaries and enabled the agencies to retain and hire motivated and competent line staff. Two juvenile probation officers mentioned that they were in the process of looking for teaching jobs when the supplements were issued, and their decision to stay in probation was directly related to the financial incentive that was issued.

For mid-sized counties, 64 percent of the 14 participants indicated that turnover rates had decreased since the supplements were issued. Chief probation officers and supervisors reported that the supplements improved the ability to attract and retain staff and enabled their departments to hire more competent candidates. The increased monetary incentive was often mentioned during job interviews and made juvenile probation positions financially competitive with positions in larger counties and with law enforcement and starting teacher positions. Also, the supplement motivated prospective case workers to complete the certification process and carry cases, rather than to seek out administrative positions that often require less skill. Those who indicated that turnover was not affected by salary mentioned that, while the supplement may initially attract employees into the field, it is not large enough to retain them. They argued that other factors, such as work environment and size of caseload, have a greater influence on retention.

For small counties, the effect of the supplement on turnover rates appeared to be more complicated. Though seven of the nine employees interviewed from small counties indicated that the supplement potentially reduced turnover, they were less emphatic in

their responses. Little opportunity for advancement within these small counties, less funding, and lower overall wages all contribute to a decreased ability to attract and retain employees when compared to larger counties. In addition, less rigorous experience requirements made it easier for recent college graduates, for instance, to join small departments at entry-level positions. However, once they gained experience, ambitious or talented entry-level workers found that there were few openings for managerial positions and looked to further their careers by applying for positions in larger counties. These factors superseded the salary supplement and contributed to the notion that these small counties are “training grounds.” This may explain why some line officers in small counties noted a need for more staff at their agencies, and a few mentioned long-term vacancies at their units. An inadequate number of personnel not only weakens a department’s ability to handle caseloads, but also makes it more difficult to implement flexible scheduling.

Finally, across jurisdictions, line officers said that salary supplements had a positive impact on morale, thus reducing turnover. However, these positive impacts on morale were not necessarily absolute. Some employees indicated that the initial boosts in morale had declined, and were unobservable four years later. The monetary incentive of the supplement had become, for some, an expected portion of their wages, and no longer served to boost their satisfaction with the job. Additionally, there are challenging aspects of these positions that can overshadow monetary supplements.

Using Jurisdictional Characteristics to Predict Recidivism – Multivariate Analysis

While bivariate relationships are important to review, it is the multivariate relationships that get to the heart of the question we are exploring. A multivariate regression analysis with all the aforementioned non-affectable and affectable workplace characteristics, as well as efficiency characteristics, found that three factors were significantly related to reduced recidivism. The strongest predictor of lower recidivism was having a lower average caseload. A related, but statistically separate significant predictor, was a smaller intake workload (more intake officers per referral). Finally, the lower the average salary of the line staff officers, the higher the recidivism rate. While salary was not significantly related to anything in the bivariate correlations, when taking other variables into account, it was an important predictor of outcome.

This analysis suggests that if agencies can lower their average daily caseload, increase the ratio of intake officers to referrals, and pay higher salaries, they will improve their client outcomes by reducing recidivism. Thus, hiring more staff and paying them higher wages are keys to better client outcomes.

It should be noted that the predictive value of this model is not very strong, with an R-squared of .21. This means that only 21 percent of the variance in recidivism is accounted for by all these relevant factors. There are many potential reasons why youths in one jurisdiction may be less likely to return to the system than in another jurisdiction. Among others, these could include crime rate, treatment program quality and availability, school district policies of referral, and community resources. However, there are only some factors under the control of the juvenile justice agency. This study found that three factors that are under the control of the jurisdiction can reduce recidivism: reducing caseload size, increasing the number of intake officers per referral, and increasing the salaries of line officers. If recidivism is reduced by channeling resources into these areas, it is likely that costs associated with the reforms will be recaptured with lower numbers of youths coming back into the system. Further research and cost analyses must be done to quantify these potential effects.

Summary of Findings

Answering the question of how juvenile justice agencies can improve youth outcomes by making organizational changes is a difficult task. However, this data-gathering process and analysis provide critical first steps in finding answers to this broad and important topic. Taken together, the quantitative and qualitative findings in this study support several conclusions.

1. Even in one state and under the auspices of one statewide probation agency, there is much variation among jurisdictions. Jurisdictions vary widely in terms of workload and workplace characteristics. Some of these differences are in salary and experience levels of the officers, turnover rates, case processing times, successful program completions and placements for the youths, and recidivism rates. For example, in the larger counties, the officers are paid better, have bigger caseloads, have a greater proportion of

supervisors, and the youths are more likely to be shuffled between available placements.

2. There are considerable differences in educational level, salary, work experience, retention rates, and job satisfaction between detention and probation officers. Likewise, there are county-specific characteristics that influence line officer retention and client outcomes. Small county staff are generally paid less than medium or large county staff and generally do not have as many opportunities for advancement. Interview data suggest that small counties often lose employees to medium and large counties, while large counties must compete with higher-paying adult or federal probation positions in recruitment and retention.
3. One proxy variable for system efficiency and stability was related to several workload and workplace characteristics. This variable measured the average number of placements juveniles in the jurisdiction experienced based on each referral. Jurisdictions with a higher number of placements per youth also had higher caseloads, lower supervision ratios (more workers per supervisor), longer case processing times, and more unsuccessful supervision/probation outcomes. These findings support the possibility that an overworked probation department leads to more placement movement for clients.
4. Surprisingly, in this study, employee turnover rates were not significantly related to any of the other jurisdictional variables measured and did not affect recidivism. Clearly, staff turnover rates had been reduced to very low rates; a median of 3 percent staff turnover with almost one-half of jurisdictions reporting no turnover. Thus, it seems that turnover rates had been reduced in prior years with the addition of salary supplements. The interviewed staff generally agreed that decreased turnover rates and improved employee morale had positively influenced client outcomes.
5. The multivariate analysis suggests that if agencies can lower their average daily caseload, use more intake officers per referral, and pay higher salaries,

they will reduce recidivism. Thus, hiring more staff and paying them higher wages is a key to better client outcomes.

6. The influence of the chosen jurisdictional level variables in predicting recidivism was relatively small. Many of the important factors that affect youth outcomes are not under the control of the juvenile justice agency. These may include crime rate, treatment program quality and availability, school district policies of referral, and community resources.

Discussion

Clearly, the functioning of juvenile justice agencies can have tremendous impact on the officers who work there and on the youth they serve. This study highlights the areas of agency functioning that can positively impact the return rate of youths to the system. Together the qualitative and quantitative findings suggest four different areas for change: a) probation officer well-being is vital, b) salary and salary supplements are important, c) caseload and workloads must be reduced, and d) community-based resources for youths and their families are necessary to improve client outcomes.

Probation Officer Well-Being is Vital

Officers working in the juvenile justice workforce are responsible for rehabilitating youth who have broken the law and ensuring their safe and supportive return to their families and communities. This task requires a great amount of skill and dedication. Juvenile probation officers are responsible for overseeing youth in their communities and facilitating the process by which these youth are reunified. Juvenile detention and correctional officers must help create a safe environment for youth in custody. Juvenile probation officers must oversee many cases and often work in unsafe environments. In addition, state and federal mandates require that officers perform administrative tasks, making it difficult to adequately complete work in a forty-hour work week, thus increasing stress level and burnout.

Decisions of juvenile probation workers are important, and errors have potentially grave consequences for children and families, further underlining the importance of having a highly skilled workforce. However, juvenile probation agencies have found that

attracting and keeping highly trained professionals has proven difficult. Salaries in the human service sector are traditionally well below those paid in many other sectors, a position seriously at odds with the level of responsibility placed on caseworkers.

Salary and Salary Supplements are Important

Approximately \$272 million was spent on juvenile probation services in Texas in 1999. Local county governments contributed \$178,201,569 for juvenile probation services and the State of Texas contributed \$93,403,750 through an appropriation to TJPC which was distributed to local juvenile boards. The legislature appropriated only \$10 million more for salary supplements. However, this relatively small amount was able to reduce staff turnover by approximately one-third.

Moreover the current study found that salary was one of the three main predictors of youth outcomes. A better paid probation staff was predictive of lower rates of recidivism. This finding would likely have been even stronger had the salary supplements not been implemented. According to TJCP the introduction of salary supplements reduced turnover considerably, by one-third. In Texas, about one-half of the jurisdictions had absolutely no turnover in 2002, suggesting that salary supplements were an extremely important motivator for retaining staff.

Qualitative data collected also revealed that salary alone does not predict whether good probation workers will stay or whether they will be effective. Other factors, such as advancement opportunities, good work environments, quality of training, nature of supervision, consistency in policy and practice, and the ability of human service workers to make a positive impact, also have considerable bearing on turnover and on clients' lives.

Reduce Caseloads and Workloads

The analyses showed that lower caseloads and lower intake workloads for officers were related to lower recidivism rates. Thus, the agency's ability to hire more officers was related to youth outcomes. Channeling funds into hiring and retaining qualified officers is paramount because this in turn will reduce caseload and workload.

Although money and professional growth are important in alleviating turnover and improving quality of work, the probation officer's desire to help children, families,

and communities seems to be playing a separate and significant role in improving outcomes. A heavy workload, however, is related to stress and burnout and affects the quality of services provided to children and families. The literature also reveals that more and more administrative duties are being expected of human service workers, and Texas probation officers are no exception. In Texas probation agencies, officers stated that client contact is sacrificed in order to fulfill administrative requirements. With increased administrative duties, there is a danger of creating a disconnect between the actual nature of human service work and the expectations of human service workers to serve the public.

Focus on Community-based Resources for Youth and Families

The quantitative analysis did not account for much of the variance in recidivism rates (only about 20 percent). Other factors, such as community resources and programs must also be addressed if youth outcomes are to improve considerably. An issue brought up by most interview participants was the lack of much needed community resources and programs that benefit clients and families. Chief probation officers argued that this is primarily due to a lack of funding to implement such resources and programs. There is disconnect between departmental needs and financial allocations, and clients ultimately suffer from inadequate rehabilitation and aftercare. In turn, line officers feel dissatisfied with their jobs; many mentioned that their desire to maintain their positions lies in their feeling that they are able to make a positive difference in the lives of the young people they serve and in the community in general. If they feel like they are unable to accomplish this mission, they will resign and look for another job.

Specifically, there is a need for the development of programs and resources addressing client mental health needs. In one large county, the chief probation officer estimated that over 60 percent of referrals are children suffering from a mental illness. Many chief probation officers stated that recidivism rates are tied to mental health, and one probation officer stated, “If we can help our kids by referring them to a community agency that’s better equipped to handle their mental health needs, kids will understand that they don’t need to come to juvenile hall to get better.” Line staff are not properly trained or certified to act as clinicians, and there are often too few, or ineffective, programs to which they can refer their clients. Over three-fourths of line officers stated

that their jobs are increasingly forcing them to attain specialized knowledge in a variety of different fields. Line officers felt that they must have the skills of social workers, therapists, and paralegals to truly make a difference in client lives.

Conclusion

All of the issues identified in these analyses must be addressed to produce positive impacts on outcomes for clients in the juvenile justice system. The costs for providing juvenile justice services are skyrocketing and some of the causes are high staff turnover, high detention rates, and a large percentage of youth cycling back through the system. If agencies can successfully reduce turnover and create the necessary support for officers and juveniles alike, we believe they can eventually reduce costs by reducing recidivism and the need for excessive hiring and training of new officers.